

[Seamen's Stories]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

JUL 6, 1939 Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Marion Charles Hatch

ADDRESS 862 First Avenue

DATE June 26, 1939

SUBJECT Seamen's Stories

1. Date and time of interview During the week.
2. Place of interview National Maritime Union of America 126 11th Avenue New York City
3. Name and address of informant

Workers who contributed these stories were Agues Shipper, stewardess; Sitting Bull, seaman; T.C., stewardess; H. Bennett, seamen.

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. No one.

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5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

No one

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C

TEXT OF INTERVIEW (UNEDITED)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Marion Charles Hatch

ADDRESS 862 First Avenue

DATE June 26, 1939

SUBJECT Seamen's Stories A STRANGE CRUISE

By-Agnes Shipper

I was on a ship, the President Arthur, a Jewish company had started the Palestine line and they finished by making just three trips and the line was finished. In the office where they were selling tickets, they had beautiful pictures. They would tell the passengers they had a beautiful swimming pool on the ship, beautiful quarters, and it turned out that the pictures they were showing were the pictures of the Leviathon Leviathan . When I joined the ship they had already made one trip.

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They only had one ship but they told the passengers they had a raft of them. So when the ship came in, it came in late the entire crew got off, the way they were treated. So they hired another crew. The crew walked on and saw the condition of the ship. They all walked off again. So they had to take the ship out in mid-stream, come down to the office and get another crew.

So they got the new crew down to the dock and took them out on tugs. So while I was walking around on the ship, trying to find the purser of the chief steward, to get my bags off, while this was happening they took the ship out in midstream. So then the crew wouldn't work. So all these Jewish passengers came on. Ordinarily a ship is very neat.

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The passenger walk on to a perfect ship. Here the beds were all down, the chambers out, fruit scattered around. So we all had to stay. Even the passengers couldn't get off. I didn't get into a uniform until we were ten miles out to sea.

Then when everybody saw they couldn't do anything about it they made the best of it. The stewards started to make up the rooms and the passengers started to ask where the swimming pool was. Then we told them the swimming pool was in the basins in their rooms, the only swimming pool there was. Then, when we finally got to Naples, they decided to make a ferry boat out of it. They ferried back and forth between Naples and Alexander, about six times, before we came back. We nicknamed the ship, the Mediterranean cruiser, or the baloney express.

The ship broke down and had to wait there four weeks longer. The ship's boilers had to be repaired. So I used the time to fall in love with one of the chief engineer's and got married. So I made a honeymoon out of it.

So the chief steward, who was a German, after he got all the stores, the victuals, on board, he went ashore to the different store keepers then at four o'clock in the morning

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the merchants would come alongside, in row boats, and buy the stuff back, half the price, and he made that money. So then, when the engineers found that out, after the coal was all aboard, the engineers sold the coal over the side, the same way. So when the sailors found out they started to sell their rope over the side, just leaving enough coal, rope, etc., to get along with.

So then when the stewards heard of that they started stealing the sheets and the silverware. I had a set of silverware myself. Then we started back to New York. When we got several miles out, half way, the coal started to give out. We were going around in circles.

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They had no coal, no steam, [nowpower?]. They were using wood, whatever [they?] could find, steamer chairs and everything, to make fires. They had to put in to Halifax to get coal.

Four days before we reached Halifax the food gave out. When the crew heard about it they stole all the food they could and let the passengers go to the devil. So one of the engineers had a lot of oranges in his room and he shared them with us.

Then they discovered that ail they had on the ship was dried herring, That made us awful thirsty. Then the crew started to look for some food and away down they found some powdered eggs that was laid there before the ship was laid up. It was all moldy. Then the horrible part of it was the engineers, they were drunk in Naples most of the time and they had failed to put a fresh water supply on. So the fresh water gave out and they had to make tea with salt water and eat herring.

In spite of that we had a wonderful time. We did just as we darn pleased. We knew that we would all be fired. The chief steward got off the ship in Halifax. He knew he would be under arrest.

***** OLD SUZANNAH By Sitting Bull

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I had a ship mate once, a little rebel. He was known as a great performer. One time he was aboard a ship, American-Hawaiian steamship line. So he proceeded to get drunk in port one night and he came aboard ship. He had a habit of swinging on ten tantlines. So he swung out on one of these tengantlines, lost his hold, and dropped into the bay. It happened in Seattle and there was a bunch of dunnage floating down there.

So anyway this rebel kid climbed over to the dunnage, rolled up 4 on it, and he was floating around there in the harbor, on this dunnage.

In the meantime aboard ship, there was a general cry of "man overboard!" The mate and the skipper came down and started to lower away a boat. They had a big searchlight playing on the water, there. So far off in the darkness, just as the frantic searchers were about to reach an end, they heard the familiar strains of "Old Suzannah."

So the payoff is, they turned the searchlight on him and he was lying on his back on the top of this dunnage, singing Old Suzannah at the top of his voice.

***** PREDICAMENT By T.C.-Stewardess

We went on the rooks, on the steamship Monorgo, and we was a month there, somewheres in Cuba. The night when the ship come out the purser told us if you want to be modest to be sure and be heavy dressed because the ship might turn over, when it come off the rocks.

***** STOWAYS By Sitting Bull

This was the first time I went to sea. I stowed away. My brother and I both. We bought two pounds of chees, two pounds of crackers, two dozen oranges and a dozen sacks of Bull Durham, so we went up to the head lines, hand over hand. We got into the lamp locker. We stayed there for three days. Finally we got so damned tired of crackers and cheese that we [decided?] to give ourselves up. So it was late in the evening, I should say early in

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the morning, about three o'clock in the morning. So we came up out of the lamp locker and there was a lookout on the foc'sole head.

So we walked up to him, his back was turned and tapped him on the 5 shoulder and says, "you got visitors." So he wasn't even surprised. That's the funny part of it. Very nonchalant. He told us to go back and get something to eat. We [?] worked the rest of the way over.

When the mate took us up to the skipper there was a bunch of passengers around there. The bosun told the mate earlier in the morning. The mate couldn't wait until after breakfast. So he run right in during breakfast and said, "There's two stowaways aboard, in front of all the passengers. So, naturally, they wanted to get a glimpse of two, live, stowaways. So there was quite a procession, no fooling.

They were lined up all around. There was a blond there. She had a consuming curiosity. So as we passed the midships house, going down the starboard side, this woman was looking around the corner, there. By the time we got up to the fore part of the midships house she was peeking around the corner again. She must have run all the way, a little short of a hundred yards.

***** JOB AUCTION By Sitting Bull

On board ship the mate gest so much out of line with his authority that the men have to use job action. This job action consists of anything that will make the mate mad and he can't do anything about it. On this particular ship the mate was pretty phony and so the men started a job action on him.

They were painting in the foc'scle head and so each man would draw a great big picture, putting underneath it, the mate or the skipper and they could see it from the bridge very easily. So one guy would come over paint a big X through the picture. So the guy who drew the picture would pretend he was crying, "Oh my masterpiece."

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So the mate couldn't do anything about it so he made certain concessions and so the fellows went back to work again.

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TANKERITIS

We had an old chief engineer on the [Veedol?]. They called him 'Snug Harbor'. Every night they used to cook these potatoes with overcoats on them, you know, boil them. So in the morning, when we got up, we would find them around the steering engine and the ice machine. So they watched him. They caught him one morning going over and taking the potatoes out of the pot and heaving them at the ice machine and steering engine. Some times he would go over there and talk to the ice machine just like it was human. Then he would get sore at it and start heaving potatoes at it. He would pat it and speak to it then he would get mad at it, run in the galley, and out come the potatoes.

Same old guy, something went wrong with the vacuum gauge. So they couldn't get enough vacuum on it, see. So he went over and started talking to it, just like he did the ice machine. Then he turned around and shook his fist at it. Then he started to walk up the grating. Then he turned / around and shook his fist at it. Then he [started?] to walk up the grating. Then he turned around and shook his fist at it again and then he spit at it.

That's what you call tankeritis. That's when the gas gets you.

***** INSTINCT By. T.C.

It just happened I was supposed to go on the Morro Castle. I worked on the Morro Castle since she was new. So before this trip they called the house and I said to tell them I wasn't home. I just didn't want to go. I didn't think anything would happen to the boat but I just didn't want to go. So now I'm glad I didn't.

It might have been instinct.

ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN By Sitting Bull

I'll read an excerpt from a letter I received:

"I read in the paper where some fink-herder, here, had two boats burned and that the damage amounted to \$1,000. According to later dispatches a station wagon, belonging to the same fink, accidentally caught fire and one of his employees fell and struck a baseball bat, while running to the scene. Coincidentally both occurrences happened in the shelter of 2 A.M. (or thereabouts) darkness and one happened about an hour after the other. What a mean fate and to think that it had to happen to a poor, hard-working fink."